

**DISTRIBUTING PACKETS AMONG MULTIPLE TIERS OF
NETWORK APPLIANCES**

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

5 A network is disclosed that includes a first tier of forwarding agents connected to
a first tier of network devices. A second tier of forwarding agents is connected to a
second tier of network devices. A service manager is configured to receive a packet from
one of the forwarding agents; determine the tier of the forwarding agent; and send an
instruction to the forwarding agent directing the forwarding agent to forward the packet
10 to a network device connected to the tier of forwarding agents that includes the
forwarding agent.